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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Thorvald Stoltenberg says chances of averting war in Croatia have improved after talks between Government and Serbs in Geneva.

* UNPROFOR recalls troops from Zepa after Bosnian Serbs prevent them from carrying out peace-keeping tasks; Sarajevo remains stable despite slight increase in number of firing incidents.

* Secretary-General recommends Security Council establish international commission of inquiry in Burundi to investigate assassination of President in 1993 and subsequent massacres.

* Human rights violations in Bosnia and Herzegovina undermine entire international rights structure, Subcommission on Minorities is told.

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Representatives of the Croatian Government and the Croatian Serbs met for seven hours in Geneva today in a bid to prevent all-out war in the Krajina. Talks focused on humanitarian assistance, the military situation, and economic and political cooperation. Mediator Thorvald Stoltenberg said that the parties had come closer to an agreement than he had expected and that the chances of averting war had improved. He added that a cease-fire agreement was possible.

Mr. Stoltenberg told correspondents that he would be traveling on an urgent basis to Zagreb, and then on to either Knin or Belgrade, for discussions tomorrow. Whether the Croatian parties held a second round of talks would depend on the outcome of those discussions.

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For information media—not an official record

Meanwhile, the United Nations described the situation in Croatia as extremely tense and highly volatile. Government and and Serb forces were reinforcing and consolidating their positions around Knin in Sector South, while Government troops continued their build-up around the zone of separation in Sector North. Small-arms fire was reported in Sector East this morning.

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The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) has recalled its troops from Zepa, the eastern enclave which fell to the Bosnian Serbs last week, according to a spokesman for the Organization. Force Commander Lieutenant-General Rupert Smith decided to take that action because the Serbs would not permit them to patrol or carry out any useful peace-keeping tasks. Some 150 troops from France, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the United Kingdom left the area in two convoys and arrived in Sarajevo this morning.

There was a slight increase in the number of firing incidents in the Bosnian capital yesterday, but the situation was otherwise stable. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that it was once more experiencing problems with humanitarian access to the city, although the situation in Gorazde had improved considerably. The Bihac pocket remained blocked, but all sides had given clearance for a convoy tomorrow.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has recommended that the Security Council establish an international judicial commission of inquiry in Burundi. The commission would: establish the facts relating to the assassination of the President of Burundi in October 1993, the massacres that followed and other serious acts of violence and political crimes; recommend modalities for the trial and punishment of persons identified as being responsible for those offences; and recommend measures to prevent any repetition of such deeds and eradicate impunity in Burundi.

In a letter to the Council dated 28 July, the Secretary-General stressed that the commission would require the support of the Burundian authorities. The Government should: adopt any measures needed for it to carry out its functions with full freedom, independence and security; provide necessary information and free access to official archives; and guarantee full respect for the integrity, security and freedom of witnesses, experts and any other persons who helped the commission.

The Secretary-General proposed that the commission consist of three members appointed by him, with the United Nations Secretariat providing necessary support services.

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He based his recommendations on a report by Dr. Pedro Nikken, who undertook a mission to Burundi to discuss the possible establishment of a commission of inquiry with the Government. Dr. Nikken played a central role in designing the El Salvador commission.

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People are losing faith in the defence of human rights because of the unchecked violations occurring in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has heard. Jose Bengoa, expert from Chile and Subcommission Rapporteur, said the recent resignation of the Special Rapporteur on the former Yugoslavia, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, was a challenge to the United Nations. He warned that the sense of international solidarity regarding human rights could be lost.

Asbjorn Eide, expert from Norway, said the whole international human rights structure was threatened in Bosnia. Both human rights issues and political issues should be considered in the international community's response to the situation there. If the world made distinctions between the two, it would destroy the credibility of international human rights instruments.

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